

Centrifugal Force

by CLS

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Summary: The Marauders in their final year at school: Voldemort rages outside; inside Hogwarts things are not so safe and secure as they once were... featuring intrigue and romance. A loose sequel to 'Black Shadow'. WORK IN PROGRESS.

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Centrifugal Force, Part 1: Curses Foiled Again

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****Part 1: Curses Foiled Again****

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Elise could hear before she could see. At first, hearing was her only link with anything outside herself. Without that link, she had been trapped inside her mind, running endlessly down long corridors with many shadowy rooms she was afraid to enter, rooms she barely glimpsed before fleeing. A presence--someone or something--waited for her in shadow, sang a song to her she couldn't quite hear. Was she running toward it or away?

"No change in her condition?"

Her whole universe flipped: white to black, down to up. Now she knew those sensations were sounds. Now she knew that they were voices not her own. Now she knew that something existed outside herself.

"No. Lamont's been trying to break the curse, but nothing so far. He thinks he's got a potion that might work."

Two different voices. Familiar. Male. Sensations of pleasure and pain. Voices that rewarded as well as punished.

"We can't put this off much longer. Our innocence is being questioned."

Severian Malfoy. Frowning. She knew from the tone that his face would have a look of irritation mixed with impatience. The shadowed corridors dissolved around her and she saw instead her uncle with his hard, square face and angry eyes drilling into her. At least that's how she imagined him, and was grateful she couldn't see.

"Yes. They'll want to see her soon."

Cousin Lucius. Calculating. His voice was not angry. No, he used anger precisely, like a fine, sharp knife for dissecting. He would be figuring the angles with his long, thin face set in a guardedly neutral expression and his pale eyes fixed on some distant spot.

Who were they, she wondered, the mysterious they who wanted to see her? Where was she? Cursed, obviously. How had she gotten here? Something had gone wrong, horribly wrong, but she couldn't quite seize the memory, as if a wall of dense, acrid smoke hung before it. If only she could reach in...

"I've sent for Veronica," her uncle grunted. "Perhaps she can get the girl out of this-- this curse, if that's what it is."

Oh, no, Elise thought, not Mother. She tried to stay away from her mother as much as possible. Normally this wasn't difficult since she divided her time between the French Riviera and a castle in the Pyrenees belonging to her second husband, a creepy Spanish warlock named Claudio. Elise could picture the scene of weeping hysteria when she arrived. Maybe she would recover before her mother showed up. She tried moving and succeeded in wiggling her toes and fingers slightly. Neither man noticed as her uncle continued to rant.

"And what was she doing anyway?" spluttered Uncle Severian. "You were supposed to be watching her, Lucius! But she turns up in the woods after some sort of duel with-- with the son of that Black fellow who's been making things hot for us."

"Dear Elise took a bit of initiative," Lucius drawled with amusement. "She is quite cunning, you know, although a bit wild."

Elise wanted to scream and then was happy she couldn't. Instead, she forced herself through that wall, battling the white-hot pain of remembering.

"However," he continued, "her little escapade did provide a diversion. The Ministry had more spies on us than we realized--thanks to Black--and the entire Hit Squad could have come down on us, if the plan of ours had gone ahead. We're lucky to have gotten out of that situation. Don't you think so, Father?"

Her uncle grunted. He was no tactician, but usually left that to Lucius. Elise imagined her cousin smiling mildly, knowing that he was right once again. Lucius was fond of behind-the-scenes strategy and avoided the spotlight, leaving that to his older and stupider brother Junius. Elise was never sure how much of this her uncle grasped. For herself, she had learned to be very, very cautious of Lucius.

"We're going to look guilty," retorted her uncle, "like we sent her out to...to... Oh, hell! There was a Mudblood involved, y'know."

"Yes, of course, I know," Lucius replied with a trace of long-suffering irritation.

"What am I going to say to the Ministry people?" Uncle Severian growled. He was generally much better at flogging people than at soothing them. There was a pause and Elise fancied she heard Lucius moving around the bed with those nearly silent steps of his.

"They're sending someone over from Magical Catastrophes," he replied thoughtfully, "someone very junior. We'll tell him that she was obviously defending herself against those vicious boys. Just look at the damage they did... It would be more convincing if we could bring her around, of course, but Lamont hasn't figured out what spell she used." He paused and Elise could almost see the smile steal across his face. "Something nasty, to be sure. I'm quite certain she wasn't defending herself..."

What spell had she used? She remembered now and wanted to shriek out loud, but only succeeded in twitching her ankles. Deprivatas Sensoria, of course! She found it in one of the spell books Lucius kept in the drawing room at Malfoy Manor, under the floor boards, a place he thought quite secret. Judging from a few notes on a scrap of parchment in the book, she didn't think even he had attempted it. Oh, it was a wickedly lovely enchantment: the senses extinguished one by one, leaving the victim a prisoner in his own mind. Had it backfired somehow, leaving her in this dreadful state?

She meant to deliver the Mudblood to them, thinking that it might lessen the continual punishment she seemed to be getting this summer - most of it unjustified. She barely started on the spell when that irritating idiot Sirius Black showed up. She had a notion that she got her wand back and tried again, but couldn't quite remember. Images of a large black beast assaulted her when she tried. Maybe from some counterspell of Black's? She couldn't quite hold on to the scalding memories.

"She is a Malfoy, after all," she heard Uncle Severian concede gruffly. "But, we've let her have too much freedom," he continued and she could hear his harsh footfalls digging into the floor. "Really, Lucius. A Malfoy expelled from Hogwarts! That was going too far."

"You must concede, Father," Lucius replied slowly in that way he had of baiting the trap before slamming it shut, "that her efforts over the last two years have proved exceedingly useful. The Lord has been very pleased with the results. We have eliminated several disloyal followers, some dangerously so, and made some valuable recruits. I'll admit she was a trifle careless, yes."

"Careless!" snorted her uncle. "That's an understatement."

"We lost a trinket of some value, but none of our plans were compromised. She'll have to return to Hogwarts, of course. A pity that we cannot use her again..."

What? Elise inwardly jumped in surprise and her left side began to twitch violently.

"There, you see," murmured Lucius, "she's starting to come around already."

Return to Hogwarts? That was about the last thing on earth she wanted to do. Being expelled had been a big relief, at least until Lucius got her alone... Six years at Hogwarts had been enough. Although she enjoyed the intrigue, she could do without the other aspects of school: tedious classes, boring teachers, annoying ghosts. And playing the role of sweet and innocent Elise from Ravenclaw had become nearly intolerable.

"We will look a trifle too...guilty, don't you think," Lucius inquired, "if Elise does not return? We need her to be a good little girl for just a bit longer. She only has one more year. As you sit on the board of governors, Father, I am sure you can convince them to re-admit her."

Elise felt his fingers stroke her cheek, so gently, so softly. Yet she shuddered, thinking about what always came after...

"Yes, well," coughed her uncle suddenly, "You're probably right."

"Yes, Father," Lucius said smugly, withdrawing his hand from her cheek. She heard the noise of feet and then the door closed with a snap. Silence fell, in the way a windowless room goes dark when its only candle is extinguished. She had a lot to think about in her little prison. What if she didn't recover, she wondered, and the thought sent chills down her spine. No. She would recover. There was a reversal spell and even a curative potion which was supposed to help, according to the book. The Malfoys always had the best when it came to curses and potions, and she was too valuable to the family. She hoped this was so, anyway.

At least she had saved them from exposure with her impromptu scheme to catch the Mudblood. She ought to be able to get something out of Lucius for that, some reward, especially if she had to go back to Hogwarts. It was partly his fault that she got caught anyway. She remembered that night angrily, her body twitching uncontrollably again, although there was no-one to see it.

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Elise crouched in the shadow of the greenhouse, watching the sun drop toward the lake. She shivered, not only because the late spring afternoon was chilly, but because she was wearing a dreary black cloak. Best for sneaking around, she knew, but dreadfully unfashionable. A few last rays of light glimmered on the part of the lake she could see from her hiding place. The lawn leading to the lake was empty. Everyone was inside the castle, eating dinner in the Great Hall. She had other plans.

The great booming voice of that oaf, Hagrid the gamekeeper, came into earshot. He was singing off-key and approaching the castle, presumably for dinner. After he passed her and went through the great doors, she got ready to run across the lawn. A movement near the

castle caught her eye and she stopped, pulling back into her hiding place.

Someone, a student, walked quickly from the castle past her vantage point. Elise frowned, trying to place the boy, who had brown hair and a slight build. A Gryffindor. Lupin, that was his name. Elise hadn't given him a much thought until now. He was mousy and quiet, always sitting in the back during the Astronomy class they shared, overshadowed by his loud friends. Someone in Slytherin hinted that he messed around with Dark Magic. She had a hard time believing that; she knew a thing or two about Dark Magic, after all. As she watched his figure disappear from view, she remembered that her family seemed to be riled up about his father who was making trouble for the Dark Lord in some way. Perhaps she would speak to her uncle. The Lupin boy might prove valuable. She didn't think he would be much of a challenge.

After he had disappeared, she waited several minutes and then made her way swiftly across the lawn and to the back of the gamekeeper's hut. She knew that the moon was full tonight and she wanted to avoid crossing the lawn in its bright glare. Twice this term she had been caught sneaking outside and she was running out of convincing stories. She did not intend to be caught again.

She waited for an hour until it was time for her appointment, not wishing to be there any earlier than necessary. Wrapping herself tightly in the cloak, she slipped into the Forbidden Forest. Moonlight occasionally poked through the leaves of the trees, taking her by surprise as it burst onto the forest floor or splashed her cloak. This path was supposedly safe, but each time she made the journey, she wondered. She held her wand out, just in case, mentally reviewing spells that might come in handy. As usual, she heard nothing, saw nothing living, except ... except spiders. Small spiders with too many shiny eyes hung motionless in glittering, moonlit webs. The small ones she could deal with. The big ones, the ones she didn't see, terrified her, although she would scarcely admit that to herself. She had occasionally found very, very large webs strung across the path, never in the same place twice. And something must be making them...

That night she came to the large old oak tree without incident. She even felt relief at the sight of Lucius. He stood, nearly motionless, in a midnight blue cloak, his pale hair with a hint of moonlight glinting on it. Elise often wondered how he could manage to stand so still. She knew him well enough, however, to know that he was restless. Her initial relief soon changed to the familiar mixture of fear and excitement. As always, she tried not to show it and met his cold look with a casual smile.

"Any trouble getting out?" he asked impatiently.

"No one saw me, if that's what you mean."

He moved toward her. It was dark under the oak; scant moonlight penetrated its dense tangle of leaves and branches. She smiled expectantly at him, leaning on the tree, feeling its rough bark against her hands and back.

"Now for your report," he said brusquely. "Any luck with Pomfret?"

"Oh, yes. He was easy once I got him away from his books."

"Tell me." Lucius drew closer to her, close enough to touch her, yet he held back.

"In a broom closet, if you must know. I told him I heard a funny noise, then followed him in. It was very -uhm- tight in there. He wanted to kiss me from the start, I could tell. When he finally worked up the nerve, I let my blouse fall open...enough to startle him. Then I slapped him for being a brute. You should have seen the look on his face - because of course it was what he wanted to do but he hadn't thought of it yet. He cried. Then I cried, too, and told him how horribly boys usually treated me, but I knew he was different...Well, he got to kiss me again after that."

"A very promising beginning. Did you find out anything about his parents' loyalty?"

"No. But I think another time or two and he'll be happy to unburden himself. He seems like the type for confession, especially when there's a ... sympathetic ear."

"And Rosier? "

"I found out what you wanted..." She paused, holding something back, something she knew Lucius wanted.

"Well?" He began to play with her hair, twisting it between his fingers. "Hmmm. That's excellent. Tell me the details first. How did you...?" This always interested him enormously; she might have called it excitement in someone other than Lucius.

"He got me alone in the locker room after a Quidditch game. At least that's what he thought. I spent nearly an hour waiting for him to come out, the big dope." She smiled wickedly. "I told him I couldn't see him again, confessed that I just couldn't eat or sleep for thinking about him, but that what we were doing was wrong. He was worried. I cried and dug my fingernails into his chest. It looked painful but I actually think he liked it."

"No pleasure without pain," Lucius murmured as he ran his finger along her collarbone, back and forth, very lightly.

"He got down on his knees and begged me." She closed her eyes and leaned back her head, savoring her domination over the boy. "I broke down and gave him a little of what he wanted...."

"You enjoyed it, didn't you?" he whispered, caressing her neck delicately. She sighed softly, perhaps at the memory or at his touch. Abruptly, he gripped her shoulders and shoved roughly, pinning her painfully against the tree.

"Hey, that hurts!" she cried out, opening her eyes in surprise. "What's the -"

"Too much pleasure and you lose control," Lucius spat, "and get careless." He softened and released her, saying casually, "We'll come back to this later...when you've finished your report."

She scowled at him, but continued, "His father has been talking to the Ministry, all right. Rosier doesn't know how much he's told them. He seems a little disgusted by it. Thinks his father's being a wimp."

"Interesting," mused Lucius, "We may be able to recruit him even as we destroy his father. Think you can do that?"

"Yes," she drawled, "He seems eager to be a follower."

"Good. I'll discuss it with Father, then." Lucius reached down for a leather bag on the forest floor and took out a small case of dull black leather. It seemed rather ordinary and shabby, but he handled it gingerly. "Next time you see him, I want you to give him this. Make sure he puts it on, but you should not touch it."

He opened the case to reveal a small silver ring with a red gem set in the middle. She reached out a hand, but he jerked it away.

"Don't be foolish," he snapped, closing the case. "Didn't you hear what I said? The stone is enchanted, Ravenstone's specialty. Father had to bargain with him to get it, but we think it will be very worthwhile."

"What does it do?" she asked curiously.

"Once someone puts it on, his actions can be... directed. Unlike the Imperious Curse, the spell on this ring is maintained even when we are far away, for as long as he wears it... and he will lose the will or inclination to take it off." Lucius grinned in wicked anticipation. "But, he must put it on freely and it would be best if you did not touch it. He won't feel any different after he puts it on, of course, not until we wish him to do something."

"Oh? And when will that be?"

"When he's home for the holidays. Alone with his father..." He let the words hang in the air, savoring them. Abruptly he put the case back into the bag and tossed it at Elise's feet. "See that you don't get caught with that. Even the most incompetent teacher won't miss the Dark Magic in it."

She was about to reply when a distant howl came through the forest, making her shiver.

"What's the matter?" he taunted. "A werewolf?"

"There are supposed to be werewolves in the Forbidden Forest and the moon is full," she retorted.

"That's just a story made up to scare first years," he snorted derisively. He continued in a softer tone stroking her hair again, "Don't worry about things you can't see. And now, since your report is over ..."

Later they heard the howl again, this time closer and answered by another. Elise stiffened and Lucius pulled away from her.

"Think it's time to be going?" he asked as she drew her cloak tightly closed. "Perhaps you're right. Something is moving toward us, at any

rate."

Something much closer and much larger came crashing toward them through the trees, a person by the sound of it. Lucius, looking irritated, arranged his cloak and got out his wand.

"Time for me to vanish. I trust you'll have no trouble getting back to the castle." With a swift downward stroke of the wand, he disappeared.

Elise scowled. Just like Lucius to leave her to deal with a mess by herself. If she did get caught, she'd have to take all the blame, even though he made her come out to meet him in the Forbidden Forest. She didn't have more time for such thoughts because Hagrid the gamekeeper burst out of the trees, looking concerned and surprised to see her. He was accompanied by two enormous beasts, wolfhounds with red luminous eyes which darted quickly about and then fixed on her.

"Here, Miss," he said with surprise as he yanked the dogs back before they toppled her over, "What er you doin' out? Forest's not safe tonight."

"Oh!" she sobbed, "I'm so glad you came! It was simply dreadful." Fooling him would be easy. She just hoped to avoid having to explain to the headmaster.

She didn't have to do much more than sob until the gamekeeper took her back up to the Hospital Wing of the castle, getting Madame Pomfrey out of bed. There Elise sat on one of the beds in the infirmary, weeping softly while working on a convincing story. A candle flickered on the table next to the bed, throwing scant light out to the rest of the silent infirmary with its rows of empty beds and white curtains hovering above them like ghosts. She seemed to be the only student there tonight, which suited her well. The less gossip about her little adventure, the better. Madame Pomfrey bustled about while Hagrid stood looking on, unsure of what to do until someone with more authority showed up.

First to get there was the head of Ravenclaw house, Professor Spinoza. She thought she could handle him. Later, when the headmaster arrived, things didn't quite work out. There were two problems with her story, one that she felt she could have covered and an unexpected one that left her completely baffled.

"Now, my dear," crooned Professor Spinoza in his thick Italian accent. Elise always suspected it was largely put on. He was supposed to be some big-time vampire hunter, the author of several books on the subject, and the accent seemed to be part of the whole package. "What did you think you were doing in the forest? Many things in the forest...werewolves, vampires." He rolled his tongue over this last word, as if any vampires in the Forbidden Forest were his alone.

"He-- he told me to meet him there," Elise mumbled into her hands.

"You must remember this is the third time," he said sternly, although she felt he was sympathetic underneath. She gave her most plaintive sob, burying her face in her hands. He patted her shoulder awkwardly



and continued, "We cannot have you putting yourself in danger."

Madame Pomfrey clucked sympathetically in the background, hovering at Professor Spinoza's shoulder. Then, the headmaster, Professor Dumbledore, appeared, wearing a frumpy, shapeless dressing gown and fuzzy yellow duck slippers.

"Good evening," he called mildly, stepping into the faint circle of light around the bed. Candlelight glinted off the half-moon shaped glasses balanced precariously on his long nose. He regarded her with concern and asked, "What seems to be the matter here?"

"Er, Professor Dumbledore," Hagrid cleared his throat, "Earlier this evenin' I had a bit of a warnin' from one of the centaurs. Came right into the garden, he did, and tol' me to look out for someone in trouble in the forest. Me an' the hounds went lookin' and found this lit'l girl. T'weren't safe at all." He shook his head regretfully.

"Thank you, Hagrid," Dumbledore replied, "You did the right thing. Now you ought to get back to bed. We'll take care of this."

"Right, sir," Hagrid replied, shuffling toward the door. But he stopped and returned to Dumbledore's side. "Oh. One of the dogs found this, sir." He handed the leather bag to Dumbledore.

That was the first problem. The bag from Lucius had been at her feet when the gamekeeper burst through the underbrush. Elise tried to hide it by quickly piling leaves on top with her toe but one of those wretched dogs sniffed it out. An explanation was going to be required.

"Good night, then," Dumbledore said. The hulking gamekeeper left while Dumbledore opened the bag and took out the ratty black box. Elise did not raise her head, but watched him covertly through her hair. This was not going to be easy to cover, if Lucius could be believed. Confirmation of this came when Dumbledore gasped to himself upon opening the box.

"I think you'd better take a look at this, Faustino," he said soberly, handing the open box to the other professor, who taught Defense Against the Dark Arts. The red gem glimmered faintly in the candle light. Professor Spinoza stared at the box for a moment and then looked up; a small, strangled noise escaped his throat. His eyes were wide and the blood drained from his face, making him truly look like a vampire for an instant.

"\_Damiano\_. Can it be?" he murmured. He closed the box quickly, seeming eager to get the gem out of sight, and handed it back to Professor Dumbledore. His face took on a grimmer expression and he said sharply, "This is a demon stone. Where did you get this? Who gave it to you?"

Elise took a deep breath and began speaking hesitantly without lifting her head. "He gave it to me. He- he wanted me to meet him there..." She shivered and tears choked her voice.

"Who? A student?" he cried incredulously and put his hand to her chin, forcing her to look up at him. "This cannot be! Tell me who is

this-- What student would have such a--" he spluttered, unable to complete a sentence.

"Miss de Mornay," Dumbledore said with considerably more calm, "This is very grave business. Can you tell us the name of the person, student, who gave you this ring?"

Her mind raced. She'd have to come up with something convincing. Then, she remembered the other student she had seen sneaking out, probably up to some sort of mischief. She didn't really care as long as she found someone to blame. The trembling in her voice was genuine as she said slowly, "Lupin. It was Lupin, from Gryffindor."

"Ridiculous!" blurted Madame Pomfrey who had been standing silently in shadow until now. "The child has surely been bewitched."

This was the second problem, the one she didn't anticipate. Madame Pomfrey scurried off while Professors Dumbledore and Spinoza stared at her so intently that Elise dropped her head and wrung her hands. She didn't have to fake distress any more; now she worried about keeping herself in control.

"Are you quite certain, Miss De Mornay?" queried Dumbledore gently after a very long pause. "Please think carefully, for this is a serious charge to make."

Madame Pomfrey returned with a large piece of chocolate which she forced Elise to eat, giving her some time to compose herself. Professor Spinoza continued to stare at her, murmuring low words in Italian to himself. She was not getting the reaction she expected, somehow.

"Yes," Elise said finally, swallowing the chocolate.

"Impossible," snorted Madame Pomfrey, "Mr. Lupin is very ill and is, er, in my care tonight."

Professor Spinoza took his wand and swirled it in the air over Elise's head. She felt a faint tingling and looked up to see a bluish mist before her eyes. He put his hand to her forehead briefly, closing his eyes. The tingling continued and then ceased abruptly as he dropped his hand and opened his eyes.

"Headmaster," he said and looked uncomfortably at the old wizard, "she is not bewitched..." Professor Dumbledore said nothing, but his gaze seemed to bore into her. She found that she couldn't look away, even though she desperately wanted to.

"A puzzle indeed," he replied at last, breaking the tension which encased them all. "I shall speak to your parents tomorrow, Miss de Mornay. Off you go to bed now, but come see me first thing in the morning. Please see to it, Faustino."

Professor Spinoza rose, eager to be gone, and headed for the door with his cloak swirling behind him. Elise rose shakily. She had a feeling that things weren't going to turn out so well in the morning, although she never dreamed that they'd expel her. Professor Dumbledore continued to stare at her as she walked out on Madame Pomfrey's arm, turning the box over in his hands.

"You are in great danger," he said softly, "more than you know."

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Running toward something or running away? She couldn't be sure. Along the corridor, doors beckoned, some open and some not. At last she stopped in front of a door, although she couldn't say why. All the doors looked the same, but she felt compelled to go into this particular room which was crammed with very large furniture, overstuffed sofas and chairs, tables as tall as her shoulder, bookcases that towered to the ceiling, and all in violent shades of pink, yellow and orange. She wandered through the giant furniture, feeling small, and then realized that the furniture was from the dollhouse she played with as a small child. Only now she was the size of a doll.

Over in the corner stood the pink bureau with its cracked mirror. She approached slowly, trying to catch her reflection in the mirror, its surface covered with crazed lines. Bits of color from the garish surroundings flashed at her, but no image. The wardrobe next to the bureau had yellow flowers the size of her head splashed on its pink doors. She ran her hand over the flowers. Don't open it, she thought, but even as she tried to cry out, her hand grasped the knob and pulled. Darkness inside and something more, something with glittering eyes reached out and gripped her arm, pulling her in, forcing her to drink--

She choked on vile-tasting liquid. Someone was forcing her to drink. Over the noise of her spluttering coughs she heard voices, all talking at once: low rumbling from Uncle Severian, smooth assurances from Cousin Lucius, and barely controlled hysteria from Mother.

"I believe it's working," said a fourth voice, closer at hand and belonging to the nasty drink. The owner of this voice, probably Lamont, was also holding her up, forcing her into a sitting position. As she continued to cough, dim images from the room appeared before her eyes, the shapes connected with the voices.

"Elise, can you hear me?" shrieked her mother. I'm not deaf, she wanted to say, but found that she could not speak. One of the shapes approached, looming quite close until Elise could resolve the tear-stained face of her mother framed by artfully arranged blond hair. Another shape came near, dissolving from a blur into Lucius.

"You can see us now, can't you?" he said, as if to take credit for the whole thing when it was probably due to the foul potion Lamont had just given her.

"Is she going to be all right?" Mother blubbered, taking out a lace handkerchief and dabbing her eyes.

"It's too soon to tell, ma'am," Lamont replied gravely. "I believe I know the curse that's affecting her now. However, no-one can predict what the after-effects of the curse will be or how long they'll linger." Addressing himself to the far corner of the room, he said, "I have a few modifications to make to the next dose, if you don't mind."

"Yes, be quick about it," Uncle Severian grunted. "We want her up and about as soon as possible."

He left the room, closing the door gingerly. Her vision improved and she saw details of the room, the one she usually had at Malfoy Manor with its thick blood-red drapes and yellow patterned wallpaper. She could see her uncle now, too, leaning in the corner with his arms tightly folded. Closer at hand, Lucius regarded her with cold fascination while her mother sat down on the bed, clutching her hand and weeping over it.

"Oh, dear Elise," she sobbed, "We were all so worried about you. Claudio was simply beside himself." Not bloody likely, Elise thought as she yanked her hand away, enormously relieved to be able to move again. Claudio seemed to reserve most of his feelings for his stable of hunting griffons. She had never seen him show the least sign of concern over her.

"You gave us quite a nasty shock after that attack," Lucius smiled at her in a way that said they both knew who had done the attacking. He continued smoothly, "But I'm sure you'll up and around soon. Lamont really knows his stuff. And I know you'll be eager to get back to school."

His words hung in the air. She hadn't dreamed that conversation between Lucius and her uncle, then. Elise closed her eyes, her body shaking violently as she tried to speak. No. Never. Those were the words she wanted to say, knowing even as she tried that they would talk her into it eventually.

Elise opened her mouth to speak, but felt a funny tickling in her throat. Suddenly something was choking her, filling her throat and mouth with the most unpleasant scratching sensations, and she coughed violently, expelling something from her mouth. Her mother screamed and jumped up. Scurrying along the white sheet of the bed was a large black spider with a jeweled back, sparkling as it scuttled toward the edge of the bed. Horrified, Elise coughed again, producing another similarly jeweled spider. She clamped both hands over her mouth and froze, fascinated and repulsed by the glittering nightmare in her lap.

"Well," Lucius said calmly as her mother clutched Uncle Severian for support and howled in terror, "I'd better go and tell Lamont that there are some after-effects of this curse."

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\_I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Morrigan and to Amy for helping me bring Elise's story to life. They probably know Elise better than I do, and taught me how to understand her and to pity her. She really needs some fairy godmothers.\_

\_This is the start of a long MWPP story which I seem compelled to write dealing with seventh-year angst, among other things. I'll be trying out some new things....Let me know what you like and don't like as we go along!\_

\_The next part will feature Sirius and his friends, cruising down Diagon Alley one last time before boarding the Hogwarts Express to

start their final year. \_

><br>

\_Revised 13 May 2001.\_

\_ - CLS \_

End  
file.